

Use of the bay

Comments and questions*:

“NERR designation and government control will interfere with activities that have long been a part of our way of life in Hawaii, our lifestyle, freedom, religious access, as well as affect cultural practices of the residents; Don't close the bay; assure us there are no impacts against personal boating and fishermen and other commercial entities that work in the bay; my places of fishing and crabbing have gotten smaller and tighter; if you're going to protect this area or protect the bay when you get the foot in the door, where else are you going to go; when they gotta catch their bait to go fishing, how are they going to go do that? Displacing tourist groups from one place would mean they will go somewhere else and disrupt fishing or other activities; movement may be limited in the proposed area.”

Response:

The NERR designation does not change current uses on site. Dependent upon if NOAA accepts the Governor's nomination, a management plan will be developed with public input describing the planned research, environmental monitoring, and education and stewardship activities at the site. The purpose of the management plan is to outline goals and strategies for the administration of the reserve, which includes (among other things) a research plan, education/interpretive plan, plan for public access, and a resource protection plan. The management plan would be consistent with existing plans and regulations for the area. Tourists and recreational users of the bay will continue to have access to the bay after the designation. Public access and use is a key component of a NERR.

GTM NERR in Florida: Ecotourism and recreational uses within the GTM Research Reserve including boating, picnicking, swimming, sport fishing, cast netting, hunting, group camping, primitive camping, hiking, biking, horseback riding, canoeing, kayaking and nature study.

*Quotes are from comments received at the public meeting on 1/9/14 and via email.

Enforcement of current regulations

Comments and questions*:

“One bunch of homeless guys go out there to Kapapa, and they screw everything up for everybody. Why can't we just eliminate those who break the rules? All these commercial guys know the rules, but they're not following them. There is a lack of enforcement of current netting regulations.”

Response:

Existing enforcement will continue within the NERR site boundaries. Once designated, a NERR relies upon existing state controls to ensure the continuance of research, monitoring, education and stewardship activities within the site. The management plan is not a master plan for the whole ahupuaa or the entire bay; it would cover only the area outlined by the proposed boundary.

Local management

Comments and questions*:

“Words in the notification letter reek of government controls; residents' interests will be sacrificed so that those who benefit from the designation can receive funding. Who are the community partners? What are their specific goals and objectives? It's very difficult for me to trust city, state, federal on any level whatsoever when you guys call this a community-based plan and you guys are starting from the top down. Families are divided because of this issue.”

Response:

The site was proposed by local organizations and the University of Hawaii, and as a reserve it would be locally managed. The NERR offers the chance to take up local coastal issues (such as habitat restoration or invasive species removal) and helps the local organizations to research these issues and provide better data for decision-making at the local and state levels. This helps to inform better decision making for coastal areas in the state and across the nation.

Funding is managed by a lead agency for each NERR site. In some cases this is a state agency. In Hawaii's case, this will most likely be UH-HIMB. At most other NERRs, lead agencies are advised by an advisory board on management issues for the NERR. The board for Heeia could include representatives of community groups in the area.

The kupunas' and site proposers' original intention was to increase support for their efforts to help bay restoration. There are a number of community organizations such as Kako O Oiwi, Paepae O Heeia, Koolaupoko Hawaiian Civic Club, Koolau Foundation who are already actively involved in stewardship and restoration of the land and fishpond. Within the framework of the NERR designation and management plan and with additional community support, these organizations will be better able to continue to restore and contribute to a healthier Kaneohe Bay.

Lake Superior NERR in Wisconsin: This NERR's lead agency is University of Wisconsin-Extension, and the advisory board includes the City of Superior, Douglas County, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, University of Wisconsin Sea Grant Institute, UWS, WCMP, and WDNR. The advisory board convenes committees to gather technical information or community input as needed.

Suitability of site/boundary

Comments and questions*:

“The criterion ‘minimally affected by humans (although diverted streams are acceptable)’ makes Kaneohe Bay an unsuitable selection as a NERR site; many elements present in the area will interfere with long-term research; Heeia Stream has a lesser impact on the Bay when compared to other streams (it’s a subcomponent of the watershed, more acute problems originate from other streams). Is this the best or more representative site of an estuary in Hawaii? How is Heeia a representative estuary? The proposed boundary is arbitrary and does not take into account circulation in the bay; includes waters far away from the actual estuary.”

Response:

A total of 17 criteria were considered when evaluating site proposals. Proposals were submitted from the public after a general public notice was published on April 17, 2013. The Site Evaluation Committee, which was comprised of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), County of Hawaii, County of Kauai, Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR)- Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR), University of Hawaii-Manoa, Marine and Coastal Zone Advisory Council (MACZAC), US Fish and Wildlife, Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) and Department of Health (DOH) representatives, reviewed all site proposals and recommended the ones that were strong candidates for a NERR designation, using all of the site selection criteria, to a site selection committee. The Site Selection Committee, comprised of County of Maui, County of Hawaii, County of Kauai, City and County of Honolulu, DLNR-DAR, UH-Manoa, and MACZAC representatives, found Heeia to present the strongest proposal when evaluated against the criteria.

The proposed boundary is preliminary. If the nomination is approved by NOAA, then the boundary would go through a delineation process. While a larger area for study may benefit certain research, the boundary for the NERR should be a manageable size which will "encompass an adequate portion of the key land and water areas of the natural system to approximate an ecological unit." This includes upland areas, estuarine areas and marine areas, all of which are included in the proposed boundary.

Financial impacts on commercial activities/use of tax payer money

Comments and questions*:

“I believe designating Heeia as a NERR site will have a significant negative financial impact on the commercial activities in the area. I think this is a total waste of tax payer’s money; the designation would put federal money in the pockets of the managers of the NERR.”

Response:

Permissible uses in the bay will not be disallowed because of the NERR designation. The NERR will help communities and government better manage its resources. This is a wise investment of federal, state, and local dollars: NERR sites in other states have also leveraged private funding, which amplifies modest public investment. Approximately \$4 million per year is available to researchers at NERR sites across the country through the NERRS Science Collaborative. This existing funding does not currently come to Hawaii.

Bay restoration

Comments and questions*:

“It’s necessary to deal with invasive seaweed removal. You guys brought 'em in. Now you guys get grants to clean 'em up. You guys create your own problems so you get more grants. The 'decayed' state of the bay is not accepted by everyone. Some believe it has gone through phases of sewage nutrients, coral bleaching, invasive coral sponge, and the coral in the bay is in fact resilient. What are the complaints about the area that need to be studied? When one resident was little, there were oysters and fish all at the pier right at their property line, but by the time they were 10, there were no oysters in their yard anymore. No improvements for bay resources were discussed at the first public meeting. How was the degraded state of the bay determined? What are the needs? Fighting each other within the community will just leave things as they are with no improvements for the bay. I am not convinced that designating Kaneohe Bay as a NERR site is the best way to go about accomplishing restoration of the bay.”

Response:

Among the comments received was a recognition that the bay has deteriorated over the past decades. The designation of a NERR in Heeia is an opportunity to support activities and management of resources which will help to restore the coastal and marine ecosystems in the area. More resources means more opportunities for current and future generations to use the site for cultural practice, gathering, and fishing. One common goal is to restore the bay to counteract earlier mistakes (like introducing the invasive seaweed). Issues that should be addressed in the management plan will be fleshed out during its development--expected to begin later this year if NOAA approves the nomination. The NERR designation is an opportunity to protect and care for the bay's resources and the wetlands. Research conducted at the NERR would help to inform coastal management in the area, across the state and the nation.

Process related

Comments and questions*:

“We're kind of afraid of what's going on because we weren't notified. Nothing was sent out. So many people have given up coming to these meetings already. Why is the public meeting held only after a site was selected? If we could see the emails and the comments of other community members not redacted, that would be really good. Why wasn't there more statewide, community input sought during the site selection process? I hope as we move through this process, that those concerns are taken seriously. Moderate or slight changes should occur first. Can research initiatives be added to the proposal? Will the proposal be available for public comment? Why wasn't DLNR-DAR consulted and involved? Where are their representatives?”

Response:

As part of the site selection process, the public meeting is required to be held "in the vicinity of the proposed site." Notices were published in the Star Advertiser and other islands' newspapers when site proposals were solicited. Letters to landowners, emails to stakeholders, and a newspaper ad were sent out and published prior to the public meetings. Community support was a factor which was addressed in each site proposal by the organizations proposing the site in Heeia. These existing organizations currently engage the public and have volunteer days. The activities in Heeia have been going on for years, the designation will support these projects. All comments are posted unredacted on the website at <http://planning.hawaii.gov/czm/initiatives/nerrs-site-proposal-process/>. The public was given the opportunity to submit site proposals. The public can continue to submit comments and give input on the development of the management plan.

All research initiatives currently going on at the proposed site can be mentioned in the site selection document. Once the site selection document is submitted by the Governor to NOAA, it is a public document. Comments will be addressed at the Feb. 27th meeting and all comments received by March 7 will be included and addressed in this document. DLNR-DAR representatives volunteered for both the site selection and site evaluation committees, and submitted letters of support for site proposals.

Management Plan

Comments and questions*:

“It’s important to incorporate Kaneohe Bay Master Plan recommendations in the Heeia NERR management plan; the Kaneohe Bay Master Plan was wasted effort in earlier decades. Who will be the lead agency/university managing the Heeia NERR? Who will be the next director of Coconut Island? Who are the leaders? Is there an organizational chart? How will Kaneohe Bay benefit from a scientific standpoint? Why is there no research being done that is estuarine-focused?”

Response:

Most likely, the University of Hawaii- HIMB will be the lead agency of the site. They will be guided by a management advisory board that will be created as part of developing the management plan. The selection of a new HIMB director is an internal process. The site proposal partners include UH-HIMB, Kakoo Oiwi, Paepae O Heeia, Heeia State Park and Koolaupoko Civic Club. A formal organizational chart for the development of the management plan is being developed, and the organizational chart for the research reserve once it is designated will be developed as part of the management plan. Research projects in the bay will receive support and will be able to compete for additional funding once the research reserve is designated. In addition, the NERR should be able to leverage research from other sites in the national system. There are a number of research projects being conducted in Kaneohe Bay as well as in Heeia stream. Also, the reserve management plan will help inform future research at the site.

Other issues not covered by the NERR designation and management plan

Comments and questions*:

“Is this a national estuarine research reserve or a cultural rehabilitation site? There are water issues of bringing water from Koolaupoko over to the West side. We cannot even go by Coconut Island. We cannot go by the marine base. The major problem in Kaneohe is the constant air craft noise from the Marine base. Earlier 'threats' to the ahupuaa of Heeia were deterred. We can only go to Kapapa overnight now on certain days with a permit, and a permit is only 10 people per permit. The discourteous confrontations by Marine Base patrol. The increase in size of Marine Base restricted areas. The Marine Base restricted areas continue to be unmarked. There are reckless drivers of Marine Base boat rentals.”

Response:

Cultural issues and uses of the area, as well as recreational activities and public access, will all be addressed in the management plan. The management plan is not a master plan for the whole ahupuaa or the entire bay, and will not address every aspect of the area. The focus will be on the research reserve activities within the boundary. Issues such as the activities of the Marine Corps Base will not be addressed in the NERR management plan. However, the management plan will be guided by existing plans and regulations established for the area.

Tijuana River NERR in California: This NERR is located close to a military base, and often has helicopters flying overhead. These activities are ongoing and the NERR designation did not affect this use of air space.